CHAPTER 7

Traditional Verbal Usages and Other Selston Folklore

1. LANGUAGE

The term "Language" in this section applies to those aspects of oral tradition which have greater importance linguistically than sociologically. In the usages examined under this heading the main interest was felt to be in their linguistic form rather than in the beliefs they express. Because of the importance of linguistic factors in this Survey, Language is dealt with as the first of the categories. Also for this reason, blason populaire was included under Language. Blason populaire, in which the community comments on its attitudes to itself and to other communities, undoubtedly has considerable sociological interest, but in an examination of dialect such as the present Survey, which investigates the language of the community rather than the community itself, emphasis must be given to the form of the utterance rather than to the social and psychological origins of the attitudes expressed. Proverbial sayings are included under "Language" because their cultural and moral content was again considered subordinate in importance to their linguistic form, which is generally fixed and easy to remember, thus facilitating the transmission of culture. Placenames and nicknames are included here under "Language" as they illustrate the linguistic inventiveness of the community,

nicknames in particular showing how this inventiveness has flourished in recent times.

A. Proverbial Sayings

The proverbial sayings included in this Survey were recorded during fieldwork in the Selston area. Some aspects of the construction and use of Selston proverbs will be examined in Chapter 6 (Oral Style) under the headings "Juxtaposition, Analogy, Balance and Antithesis", and "Poverbial Language in Narrative". Under these headings some investigations of their place in and effect on oral style will be made. The present chapter, however, concerns itself more specifically with the wide-ranging nature of proverbs used in Selston. Proverbial usages in Selston may be divided into categories according to either their form or their function. It is sometimes difficult to separate these two criteria in discussing proverbs but the examples are organised in the following categories to make the various types of proverbial sayings as easy as possible to distinguish:

(i) Comparisons

(a) Comparisons using the formula "as ... as"
(b) Comparisons using "like"

(ii) Weather proverbs

(a) rhyming
(b) non-rhyming

(iii) Miscellaneous proverbial sayings

(a) rhyming
(b) non-rhyming

The term "proverbial saying" has been adopted here to cover both the proverb proper and also other expressions which seem to have achieved proverbial status locally.

(i) Comparisons

The first group (a) contains comparisons in which the comparison is signified by use of the formula "as ... as". In group (b) comparison is indicated by the use of "like".

(a) One group of proverbial comparisons suggests an unpleasant degree of hardness or blackness.

A stale piece of cake could be described as being "as hard as nagnails" or as "hard as the devil's forehead". A small boy's dirty hands could be described by his mother as being "as black as the hobs of hell", "as black as old Harry", "as black as the devil's forehead", or "as black as that fireback". In any community with a Christian tradition, sayings which refer to Satan, by name or by euphemism, are intentionally pejorative. A more explicit example of this is: "as fou' (i.e. foul) as Satan". Similar disapproval is expressed in "as fou' as Sin". The ultimate in anger is captured in the saying, "as mad as old Harry".

Certain traits of human character and personality such as stupidity, idleness, deceitfulness, miserableness etc. are commented on in proverbial comparisons as is common in many other areas.

Stupid or simple people are commonly described as being "as soft as grease", ("softer than grease" is also common), or "as soft as galouk [gə'louk]". A harrassed mother with too much housework to do might describe herself as being "as throng as Throp's wife" while her lazy son sits "as idle as Ludlum's dog". If provoked she might "skelp" him even if he were "as big as a house side". After a rest, she would perhaps feel "as right as rain". A deceitful person may be described as being "as fause [fɔ:s] (false) as a cartload of monkeys", while anyone overconfident or cheeky could be called, as in many other dialects, "as bold as brass". A miserable person might have a face "as long as a fiddle", whereas a jolly person could be "as happy as a pig in muck", or "as happy as a dead bod (bird)".

Other miscellaneous comparisons include comments on human situations or are used as a means of achieving emphasis. A rather comical saying to convey pennilessness is "as free from money as a toad is from feathers". A common simile beloved of raconteurs eager to prove their veracity is "It's as true as the day". An example of this can be found on p.336 of Chapter 8. The ideas of tightness and whiteness are occasionally compared to wax in "as tight as wax" and "as white as wax".

(b) As with the similes in group (a) there are several animal comparisons among the following.

A restless person is "like an ill-sitting hen". Someone constantly coming and going, or restlessly or excitedly

darting to and fro, perhaps getting in the way or trailing dirt over carpets, is said to be "in and out like a dog at a fair". To give cake or sweets to a greedy child is "like giving a bull sugar". An enthusiastic person tackling a job would be described as going at it "like a bull at a gate" by someone who thought him too impetuous. If he was very clumsy, he could be described as being "like a cow with a spade". If, however, his efforts were appreciated, he could be said to have worked "like a thacker".[1] After rewarding himself with a few pints he would feel "blown up like a barm tub", perhaps feel inclined to "piss like a station hoss"[2] and, retiring to bed "snore like a stuck pig".

Other similes from the animal world include, of someone buying an unseen article, "It's like buying a pig in a poke"; of something with an unpleasant smell, "to stink like a foumart ['fɒmət] ['fɒməd] (polecat)"; of a person standing vacantly or stupidly, "to stand like a sucking duck".

Two derogatory similes compare human beings with food: "to sit like a suet pudding" (conveying a similar degree of idiot vacancy as to stand "like a sucking duck"); a poor growth of hair on someone's head may be likened to "hair on fourpenny bacon".

---

1. This expression is still used by older people, even though they may never have seen a thatcher at work on house roofs. The expression possibly refers to the practice of "thacking" a haystack, a common task in the days when many Selston men worked on local farms.
2. Many years ago very large horses were a common sight at railway stations.

A scatterbrain can be compared to a "fart in a bottle", a "fart in a fit" or a "fart in a colander". A useless person is said to be "like a wooden man made of smoke", an expression often used affectionately to children. A deceitful person is apt to "lie like old Harry (the devil)".

It is notable that most of these proverbial comparisons carry some mildly derogatory association or are used in a castigatory situation. The reasons are more sociological than linguistic but, since the same tendency is found in other dialects, it is no indication that the inhabitants of Selston are more cynical than others.

(ii) Weather Proverbs

Some proverbial sayings, as might be expected, apply specifically to the weather, some in rhymed form, some unrhymed. Those noted here are expressed in the fixed form of proverbial sayings which remains the same irrespective of the speaker. Beliefs and superstitions about the weather which do not have this fixed linguistic form but may be expressed in a variety of different ways are considered in Section 3, Custom and Belief.

(a) rhyming

Ne'er cast a clout till t'may is out (i.e. the hawthorn flower).

Rain before seven; fine before eleven.

(b) non-rhyming

Wet Friday - wet Sunday.

Rain is likely if:

"It's black over Bill's mother's"
[ɪʔs blak 'ɔvə bɪlz 'mɔðəz]

("Bill's mother" does not live anywhere in particular. The saying is equivalent to "It's black over there".)

Rain is likely, too, if:

"It's black over Derby Hole" (i.e. in the direction of Derbyshire).

(iii) Miscellaneous Proverbial Sayings

In Section 1 A(i) on proverbial comparisons it was observed that many sayings compared people to animals. It is also interesting to note that a number of sayings in the present category are about animals, reflecting man's close relationship with animals in everyday life.

(a) rhyming

Poultry, like pigs, are as familiar to Selston people in their proverbs as they were formerly in their yards. "Hens as doesn't lay, doesn't pay", is an expression generally used as a metaphorical comment on something uneconomical. For instance, a retired miner, on being asked why local pits had closed, began his explanation with this proverb.

A proverbial comparison between people and poultry reminds us that society formerly had no qualms about distinguishing between the roles of the sexes. A woman unnatural enough to whistle invited the comment:

"A whistling woman and a crowing hen
Are neither good for God nor men. "

In early January, the following expression, again reflecting the villagers' familiarity with poultry, is often heard:

"After New Year's tide,
the days lengthen a cock's stride. "

Another group of proverbial sayings refers to specific aspects of family and social relationship. Most Selston-born mothers complain to their sons that:

"My son's my son till he gets him a wife;
My daughter's my daughter all her life. "

Mrs. Morel, in Lawrence's Sons and Lovers uses slightly different wording:

"A son's my son till he takes him a wife,
But my daughter's my daughter the whole of her life."[1]

The embarrassment caused by a sudden and involuntary noise associated with the digestion can be charmed away by the proverbial incantation:

"Where e'er you be let the wind go free,
For it was the wind that killed me. "

This saying is reputed by Selston people to be on a gravestone in Pentrich churchyard, but is heard in other dialects. It is an example of the traditional retort, like "bless you", said after someone has sneezed.

A number of proverbial sayings reflect aspects of folk custom and belief, for instance,

"If you wish to live and thrive,
let a spider run alive. "

Indeed they are a means of transmitting such customs and

---

1. Sons and Lovers, Chapter IX, Defeat of Miriam, p. 300.

beliefs in memorable form because of their linguistic structure. Only those which have a formulaic structure are included here, the other examples being included under "Custom and Belief". Certain things done on a Saturday are believed to have a supernatural bearing on future events, as seen in these rhyming proverbs:

> "Friday night's dream on Saturday told,
> is sure to come true ere three days old. "
>
> "Saturday flit, short sit. "
> (i.e. if you move house on a Saturday, you
> will soon be moving again.)

There is even a rhyming proverb to distinguish between obesity and pregnancy:

> "If it's soft it's fat, if it's hard it's that. "

A similar use of euphemism, seen in a non-rhyming expression which is falling into disuse with the railways is, "to catch a train to Nottingham and get off at Basford", which refers to the termination of amorous advances before they go too far.

Rhyme can be put to effective use. For instance, the saying "Tiddle a brook to swim a duck to grandma's" is used to induce a young child to pass water and, incidentally, the rhyme of "brook" with "duck" shows that the saying depends upon northern pronunciation. The last word "grandma's" can be altered to any destination which will interest the child.

Most dialects have rhyming riddles and verbal puzzles. The pun in the following example depends on a residual grammatical inflexion:

"Heage and Ripley, Crich and Fritchley,
all begins with A. "

This is a local variant of the well-known formula for the verbal puzzle: "London, Leicester, York and Chester, all begins with A". The effectiveness of the local variant is reinforced by the tendency in northern speech for both the third person singular and plural of the verb to have an identical 's' inflexion which would make "they begins" acceptable because it reflects common usage. A less widely known verbal puzzle which presents the victim with an unpleasant dilemma is:

"If tha stood up to thi neck in muck,
and I holled a rotten egg at thee,
should ta duck? "
(holled = hurled, ta = you)

(b) non-rhyming

It is difficult to define precisely a non-rhyming proverbial saying. A comprehensive definition would have to include any saying or expression which has become common in the culture and provides a comment on a situation or on some aspect of life. As the general glossary (Chapter 3) contains many examples of such sayings, it seems unnecessary to include an exhaustive list here. Only a representative selection is therefore given, but even these include obvious parallels with similar proverbial utterances in common usage elsewhere.

Many Selston proverbs consist of balanced antithetical phrases, for instance: "best first - best always", said of

someone who is always wearing his best clothes. "Least said - soonest mended" provides an apt comment on the best way of ending a quarrel. "Red hat - no breeches", which means that a person wearing a red hat is not wearing drawers, is an expression used only by women of women, and explains the scarcity of red hats among local women. It may once have been true that respectable women wore sober headgear but the saying to this day provides an excuse for women to invest their personal slander with the sanction of the community.

To have more than a sufficiency of anything is to have enough to "ding dogs in the teeth with" [dɪŋ dɔgz ɪnʔ tɛɪθ wɛɪ]. To have too much to cope with is to have "too many irons in the fire" or "too much on one's slate". The fact that people with faults often see those faults in others without recognising them in themselves is acknowledged in the proverb: "If you carry a tod about you think everybody else stinks". A proverb still heard today recalls the frugality which was necessary in former times: "Tha mun eat thi bread and smell at thi cheese". Fortunately this saying is now used most frequently when reminiscing about hard times. An example of its use occurs in Chapter 8, p.328. The phrase "It's enough to" often introduces or is incorporated into proverbial utterances, for example: "It's enough to make your bum laugh" (said of anything ridiculous); and "It stinks enough to blind you".

B. Blason Populaire

Blason Populaire refers to the traditional comments of a community about itself or about other communities, particularly those in neighbouring areas. Such comments often express attitudes of suspicion or ridicule, and the desire to reinforce the identity of one's own community by drawing attention to different modes of speech or behaviour in others. An example of blason populaire has been quoted on p. 19 of Chapter 1. There are some examples of blason populaire having less linguistic significance but which reflect the sense of community which caused them to originate. Colliers still say that the first batch of miners who came to the area from Staffordshire were "swapped for a load of coal".

People from South Normanton, a nearby village, were in the past spoken of somewhat disparagingly as "Normanton Shiners", while young men from Jacksdale in Selston were advised to avoid sitting in a railway compartment with Normanton girls in case they should be attacked. Such things were not unknown in the area - a parallel exists in Lawrence's short story Tickets Please.

The reputed shrewd deceitfulness of Sheffield people is suggested in the phrase "Sheffield sharpies", hinting not only at sharp practice but at the cutlery for which Sheffield is famed. A typical comment is: [ɛɪ kʊmz frəm 'ʃɛfɪld | ɛɪz ɛ:t ɔf? nʊɪf bʊks | ɛɪl kʊt ɪz'sɛn wɒn di:] 'He comes from

Sheffield. He's out of the knife box. He'll cut himself one day'.

The epithet "Sheffield bod catchers", i.e. Sheffield bird (girl) catchers, emphasises the amorous characteristic of young men from Sheffield. The phrase has even been used humorously as a name for spats - typical devices that a smart Sheffield man might have used years ago to attract a local girl. An Underwood man recalled how, in his Sunday best, he was proudly displaying his "Sheffield bodcatchers" on a bus, crossing his legs one way and then the other to impress the other passengers, when, to his dismay, he found he had forgotten his fare. He was even more "sneaped" (embarrassed) when one of the more soberly dressed locals condescended to pay his fare for him.

Lincolnshire folk are referred to as Lincolnshire Yellowbellies, and Derby people as Derby tups or Derby rams.

A stream, running through Selston parish, rises in Middlebrook and flows through Bagthorpe. Geese were once drowned at Bagthorpe when the brook overflowed its banks, and anyone coming from Bagthorpe is teased lightheartedly because he comes from the place "where the geese were drowned".[1]

---

1. For the full story of the drowning of the Bagthorpe geese see Chapter 8, pp. 316, 317.

people from north of the brook (Selston village) say that those who come "o'er t'brook" (from Underwood) are inferior and Underwood people have been heard to impute the same inferiority to those from north of the brook.

People from Brinsley, just outside the parish, who are believed to talk "broader" than Selston people, are supposed to be fanatics about cleanliness. It is said that "There's something in the bread at Brinsley" that makes them so fastidious.

C. Place Names

There are many interesting place names in Selston parish which have originated in various ways, although the origins of some names remain obscure. A few examples are given below to indicate their variety.

The Stocking Heel is that part of Bagthorpe where the geese were drowned (see Chapter 8, p.316 and photograph, p. 389). In the last century there were stocking frames in this part of Bagthorpe and my own theory is that the place is so named because it is shaped like a stocking heel. It is pronounced ['stɔkɪn ɛɪl].

Toad Hole is the junction of Selston Lane and Wagstaff Lane.

Skegness Corner is a small area at Selston which in appearance is reminiscent of Skegness, a popular resort for Nottinghamshire miners.

Cromwell Garage. A very old building, now a garage, stands at the top of Underwood Hill not far from Wansley Hall. Cromwell's men are reputed to have shot at Codnor Castle from Wansley Hall (a medieval farmhouse still standing).

Ned's Wood. A spinney at Westwood. Many woods and greens are referred to in Selston by personal names.

Monkey Bridge. An iron bridge at Codnor Park and a wooden bridge at Pinxton, where young people used to gather for the "monkey run", a popular walk for young people when they were making friends at the weekend.

A thatched inn at Selston was locally referred to as The Thack although this was not its proper name.

The Gullets is that part of Moorgreen wood which stretches from Felley Mill to Moorgreen reservoir.

Dotty Huckna (Dirty Hucknall). Hucknall Huthwaite is still referred to as ['dɒtɪ 'ɒknə]. The name "Dyrty Hucknall" appears on eighteenth century maps.

D. Nicknames

During fieldwork I had become aware of the fact that many Selston people were known by nicknames, in particular, but not exclusively, the older men who had been miners, for example, "Dobber", "Bluey", "Lammo". A conversation with Mr. T.C. Holmes of Underwood, who had been well acquainted with several generations of Selstonians, provided surprising evidence of how widespread the practice of nicknaming had been. His explanation of the origins of many apt nicknames

testified to the linguistic inventiveness with which the Selatonian's typical sense of humour and shrewd assessment of character finds expression. Mr. Holmes kindly provided me with a list of nicknames, with explanations, which is quoted after the examples obtained from other sources.

One man acquired to name of "Guffer". He was the foreman in charge of some work and his invariable command was [ðɛɪ go fə ðɪs] 'Thee go for this ...' "Slasher" Brookes was a man who cut his throat but survived. "Pot Joe" Walters sold pots. "Punch" Hankin was so named because he was always threatening to punch people. Other nicknames are: "Pap" Daykin, who supplied milk; "Tommy 'Agg", who was born at Haggs farm; "Pluck" Bramley, a plucky fighter; "Soft Watter Jack", a campaigner for soft water installation; "Sooty" Gascoigne, a sweep; "Winky" Brogdale, whose eye was always twitching; "Apple" Jack Farnsworth, who was always talking about his apple trees; "Pissy Liz", an old woman in a long skirt who was evidently incontinent; "Split Raisin" Rawson, a shopkeeper who was very careful in weighing and who would split a raisin in two; "Breasty" Timms, a local boxer with a big chest; and "Cutey" Eggleshaw, who, I was told, "knew it all". "Ginger" Bowmar was so-called because he was reputed to put a piece of ginger under his horse's tail to make it run away from the stinging caused. He used to sell barm or yeast for herb beer which most people made in those days. "Billy Barmo" was another character who sold barm. One person acquired the nickname "Crow". He, rather like the wise men

of Sothall who put a fence round a bush to keep a cuckoo in, had rushed home as a boy and cried, "Dad, shut the allotment gate, there's a crow in".

Additional Nicknames

The following list was kindly compiled for me by Mr. T.C. Holmes, a former miner from Underwood, aged over eighty, who wrote, 'Most nicknames are derived from the names people already have, such as "Jossy" (Joshua), "Tant" (Anthony), "Fonse" (Alfonso), etc. Thus Emma becomes "Pem", Ethel "Tet" and so on, which are all easy to find.

'However, I have tried to find a few which are different. "Breasty" Timms was a fighter himself and father of several fighting sons. Any Timms would breast up to anyone anywhere at any time. "Billock" Wilson [see Chapter 8, p. 367][1] is a butcher who used to kill for himself. Whether he got this nickname from the way he pronounced "bullock" or from being clever with the "bill-hook" I cannot find out.

'"Daddy" Bates was my teacher at school, and spent a lot of time educating Jessie Chambers and myself (Jessie was "Miriam" in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers). We sat together in a mixed class. "Chippy" Leivers was a joiner - a farmer at Pool Farm, Underwood. So "Chippy" is obvious. "Dabtoe" Haywood was noted for the way he turned in his toes when walking. "Glibby" Wright was glib of the tongue. "Cocky"

---

1. Square brackets contain my insertions.

Limb was a local sportsman who fancied himself as a wicket-keeper at cricket, prone to "show off" and quite capable of dislodging a bail from the wicket with his toe - hence "Cocky"! "Dust" Bather was a local bookmaker who was continually inviting his clients to "Come on with your Dust!" "Wallet" Hatton must have been left handed. No other reason for "Wallet" is known. "Dobber" Granger [one of the chief informants of this survey] was a local Colliery Banksman and a good amateur runner. He once competed in the "Sheffield Handicap". "Cus" Wyld was a popular miner. He called all and sundry "cus", short for "cousin". He had scores of cousins! "Bendy" Hankin's legs were badly bowed; "Flash" Salmon [pronounced ['sɛɪmən]] was always smartly dressed; "Donkey" Spencer ran into a donkey while riding a bicycle.'

Mr. Holmes compiled a list of others whom he had known personally. They are as follows:

Jossy Bostock	Tet Wilson	Jot Storer
Fish Leivers	Johno Brogdale	Jotney Moss
Tuppy Flint	Tant Moss	Jody Holmes
Mick Sisson	Jimsy Hankin	Dodie Sisson
Jimpy Leivers	Trimmer Gill	Absie Eggleshaw
Jabby Gill	Daff Smith	Pilto Wilson
Wag Lemon	Lingy Gill	Squab Williamson
Sampy Walters	Jud Brown	Boy Wagstaff
Terny Smithurst	Joto Smithurst	Manny Oates
Fonse Hemstock	Natty Raynor	Manty Hemstock
Dumps Wharmby	Jacko Thornley	Whistler Chambers
Tago Leivers	Bibby Simpson	Sweb Kirk
Pimp Housley	Kelly Doody	Bidge Marriott
Jakey Swain	Peacock Fletcher	Bod Leivers
Ike Carter	Lion Carter	Butch Cox
Sheb Davey		

2. CHILDLORE

There are many aspects of the language and folklore of children which might be discussed, but I have confined this examination to a few representative examples of games, rhymes etc. to indicate something of the rich tradition of the area.

A. Games

Lerky or Lurky. A game similar to "hide and seek" (see Chapter 8, p. 324). This game was popular in the "Bottoms" in Lawrence's Sons and Lovers.[1]

Rumstickubum ['rɒmstɪkəˌbʊm]. One child is chosen to lean with his head against a wall, while another takes a run and leaps on his back crying "Rumstickubum, finger or thumb?" at the same time holding up his thumb or finger, the player beneath having to guess which it is. If he is correct, the player who is on his back has to take his place.

Poor Sally sits a-weeping. A ring of children sing in sympathy while a girl in the middle pretends to weep because her lover has gone away. They sing:

> "Poor Sally sits a-weeping, a-weeping, a-weeping,
> Poor Sally sits a-weeping on a bright summer's day.
> She's crying for her lover, her lover, her lover,
> She's crying for her lover, for he's gone away." etc.

The lover joins her in the ring and they all dance round singing happily.

---

1. Sons and Lovers, Chapter IV, The Young Life of Paul, p. 75.

Rally-o, Relieve-o, Running through the straw - chasing games.

Stick and Billet, known in Bagthorpe as Shinny. A boys' game. A boy hits a sharpened stick into the air with a stick held in his hand, then hits it again. The object is to hit it further than his opponents.

Duckstone. A game in which a stone was placed on the top of a pile of bricks or stones. The players throw stones at it in order to knock it off.

Marbles, known in the dialect as "chucktaw" was played, particularly on pancake day (Shrove Tuesday). For terminology, see Chapter 8, pp. 374, 375.

B. Sayings

A tongue twister, to be said quickly, is: "I chased a bug around a tree, I'll have his blood he knows I will".

When crows were flying over, girls used to say:

"One for sorrow, two for joy,
Three for a love letter, four for a boy,
Five for silver, six for gold,
Seven for a secret never to be told. "

Children often taunt each other by calling, "Mardy, mardy mustard, can't eat a custard!" ("mardy" = spoilt). The usual reply to this is:

"Sticks and stones will break my bones,
But calling will not hurt me.
When I'm dead and in my grave
You'll wish you'd never called me. "

Children often used to impute imbecility to each other with the words: "You're daft, my duck, you follow balloons and spit on doorsteps", an alternative version being, "You're daft, my duck, you follow balloons and wear your mother's pantaloons".

3. CUSTOM AND BELIEF

A. Custom

(1) Adult games

It is interesting to note that in addition to the games played by children in Selston, traditional adult games are also remembered and were practised until recently, and probably are still practised. Children, of course, were able to participate when these were played - as they often were - on family occasions, but they are distinct from children's games in that they were not played with the exclusive intention of amusing the children, but of providing entertainment for all participants.

Dominoes has always been a popular game among adults and there are a few interesting examples of terminology associated with this game in the transcription on p. 374 of Chapter 8.

Some games are played at family parties, particularly at Christmas, although the tradition of family games has largely died out as a result of other forms of entertainment, particularly television. I myself remember, as a child, playing one of them with adults, called Paddy from Cork. In this game a ring is put on a string. The participants sit in a ring with both hands on the string. Everybody pretends to have the ring in his hand and to pass it to his neighbour as the rhyme is being sung, either way. The person in the

middle has to guess who has the ring and if it is discovered the person holding it takes his place. The rhyme is:

"Paddy from Cork has never been,
A railway train he's never seen,
He longs to see the great machine
That runs along the railway. "

The Family Coach. A narrator tells a story. He gives every participant a part of the coach to play, e.g. wheels, cogs, upholstery. He tells the story of the family coach setting off on a journey, and as he mentions each part of the coach, the person who has that name has to stand up and spin round. When the "family coach" is mentioned, everyone has to rise and spin round. If someone fails to get up, he is out of the game.

(ii) Calendar customs

The usual April Fool's Day and Bonfire Night customs are observed. On Bonfire Night potatoes are roasted, and a typical April Fool's trick is to pretend someone has a beetle crawling on him.

On Easter Sunday, if you did not wear something new, the birds would make a mess on you. On Oak-Apple Day many years ago, all children carried a spray of oak leaves. Boys would challenge them with "Show your oak!" and if anyone had none to show, they nettled him. It perhaps commemorates the day when King Charles hid in the oak tree. Valentine's Day (14th February) is believed to be the "birds' wedding day". On that day they are reputed to choose their mates. May 29th

is reputed to be the culmination of the birds' song. On Shrove Tuesday, "Pancake Day", all the children played marbles.

A long established custom in Selston is that every Feast Sunday (1st Sunday in July), when the wakes are held, the local vicar goes to the top of the church tower to preach to the people of the parish. Incidentally, a seventeenth century rector, the Rev. Charles Jackson, was evidently not a man of peace, for in the Quaker records appears: "1660, 2nd April. Eliz. Hooton (a preaching Quakeress) passing quietly on the road was met by one Jackson, priest of Selston, who abused her, beat her with many blows, knocked her down, and afterwards put her into the water."[1]

B. BELIEF

(i) Weather

Some proverbs about the weather have been mentioned under 1.A.(ii) Proverbial sayings. It is believed that sheet lightning ripens [rɪpmz] the corn. If you tread on a "rain beetle" (a large black beetle) it will rain. It will rain if it is "Black over Derby Hole", i.e. in the direction of Derbyshire. If rooks nest high it is going to be wet. Three white frosts on consecutive days is a sign of coming rain. Other signs of rain are: if cows lie down in the fields; if trains can be heard from long distances;

---

1. E.L. Guilford, Nottinghamshire, 2nd ed. revised. London, 1927, p. 166.

if the moon has a ring round it. If the weather is "gloomy" with a bright and watery sun, the sunshine will not last and rain can be expected.

(ii) Good and Bad Luck (and miscellaneous omens)

Many Selstonians believe it is bad luck to wash a sheet on New Year's day in case they "wash somebody away". It is also considered bad luck to move house on New Year's day.

It is good luck to see the first lamb of the year with its back turned towards you. If a knife is dropped, a man is coming to the house. Crossed knives bode a fight or argument. Two spoons in a saucer signify a coming wedding. If two women pour out of one "mashing" of tea, one of them is going to have a baby. It is bad luck to show a visitor out of a door other than that by which he entered. It is bad luck to look at a new moon through glass. If a dog continually howls, someone is going to die.

It is said that a person who inadvertently puts a garment on back to front is going to receive a present. If a person is having bad luck, he might say "I think I've killed a robin (or trod on a toad)". It is considered unlucky to kill a spider: "If you wish to live and thrive, let a spider run alive".

The caul, or skin over a child's face at birth is considered to bring good luck. Sixty years ago a child in

Jacksdale would see a familiar fat little figure in a flowing black cape and skirt with silk embroidery, a bonnet tied underneath her chin and a white apron, walking along carrying a Gladstone bag. This was the midwife, "old lady" Cowlishaw. She greeted all children (having brought them into the world) and used to tap the bag and say she was taking a new baby to various addresses: "What would you like, a brother or sister?" Children used to follow her to see where she was going with the bag. Cauls were retained by the midwife and it was believed that if sailors possessed one they would never drown. (Reference is made to this belief in the first chapter of David Copperfield.)

(iii) Folk Medicine and Cures

It is believed that a stye can be cured by rubbing it with a gold ring. An unwashed sock tied round the neck is supposed to cure a sore throat. Goose grease rubbed on the chest cures a bad chest. A hair is tied around a wart to cure it. If a hair of a sufferer of whooping cough is tied round a piece of meat and fed to a dog, when the dog dies, the whooping cough is cured. Another cure is to drink "mouse-ear" tea. (This refers to the plant "mouse ear" but is perhaps connected with the custom of drinking tea made from actual mice, which is still recalled in some parts of England.) Various other teas are prepared from herbs, e.g. rue tea, yarrow tea, angelica tea and tormental tea. To cure lumbago brown paper is placed on the sufferer's back and a warm iron

rubbed over it. A reputed cure for freckles is to wash the face in early morning dew (the lady who told me this tried it as a child and washed her face in a lane near to a pit bank. She arrived home and was told to look in the mirror as her face was black with coal dust, which caused great amusement.)

4. FOLK NARRATIVE

A. Legends (true, or reputed to be true)

Daniel Boswell, a gipsy king known locally as Black Boswell, is buried in Selston churchyard. He is an important character in Miller's novels, particularly Gideon Giles the Roper. Miller, writing in the nineteenth century, notes a few examples of what he calls "old gypsy cant"; among these is the word "pad" for "road", which is frequently heard in Selston today. Boswell's epitaph is:

"I've lodged in many a town,
I've travelled many a year,
But death at length has brought me down
To my last lodging here. "

Bagthorpe is known throughout the area as the place where the geese were drowned, or among people less familiar with the legend, as the place where the ducks were drowned. This is reputed to have happened in the "Stocking Heel" during a storm, and a full account is given in Chapter 8, pp. 316, 317. Most Selstonians would vouch for the truth of this happening.

Many legends are told in Selston about Selston people and most of them are believed by their tellers to be true. Some refer to people who are still living or who have only recently died, including a local alderman who is often quoted for his wisdom. Some of these tales are told in the transcriptions, particularly in those of Informants D, E and G. Besides these, there are many others, only a few of which can be mentioned here owing to limitations of time.

Bluey, an old collier, arrived home drunk one night. He hammered on the door and found his wife had locked it. His wife appeared at the window and shouted, "Go away, you wicked man!" Bluey walked down the garden path, took the cover off the well, staggered with the big stone which was used to hold the cover on, and dropped it down the well with a loud splash. The door opened; out rushed his frantic wife crying, "Oh Bluey, Bluey, what have you done?" Bluey slipped in quickly, locked the door, went to the bedroom window and shouted, "Go away, you wicked woman!", slammed the window and went to bed.

There are many other stories about Bluey, including one about his commission to drive the local hearse, which was horse-drawn. On this occasion he was drunk and the hearse ran away with him.

People are often remembered for peculiar or amusing things they have said. One woman is remembered for having told the rent-collector, "I canna give thee anythink this wik, t'gobbins has tumbled in". The rent-collector, an ex-collier, knew that this excuse was false because "gobbings" are holes where the coal has been taken out in the pit, and he was amused by the idea of holes falling down.

One man's ladder fell from under him while he was painting his house, and he is remembered for shouting [ɛlp mɪ ɛlp mɪ mɪ fɛɪʔs ɔn·nɛut] 'Help me! help me! my feet are on nothing!'

Selston characters who have established a reputation for wit sometimes have attributed to them jokes or folktales which originated outside the area and are widely known. An example of this is the first words of a man on being admitted to a mental hospital: "Is that clock right?" "Yes," was the answer. His retort was "It's no business here then".

Political meetings are a rich source of such humour. A typical meeting, held in the Miners' Welfare building, was on the eve of the district council election. Mr. Val Coleman was retiring and Mr. Titus Searson (a pit manager) put up against Mr. Frank Pendleton and Mr. Jack Hankin. The meeting was held after the church service on a Sunday evening. That same morning, Titus Searson's staff had canvassed the whole of Selston with leaflets, thinking that this could not be answered as it was the last day. However, at the meeting that evening, Mr. Pendleton, in front of a packed audience, walked to the front of the stage with his fingers in his waistcoat, and began in a pulpit-wise manner: "I would think that most of you people present tonight, if you haven't been to a religious service this evening, have read, or heard somebody else read, at some time in your life, the various books in the New Testament: the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, but never in the history of Selston have you heard anything like the Epistle of Titus to the Selstonians!" Thus Mr. Searson's canvassing was brought to ridicule.

At the same meeting, Mr. Coleman stood up, and in a pompous manner said [haɪ av bɪn kɔn'tɪnjuəlɪ rɪ'fɛ:d tɪu əz ɛɪ ba:m 'dɔmplɪn] 'I have been continually referred to as a barm dumpling', and another collier called from the front row [aɪ ən ða ɑ:t wɔn] 'Aye and thou art one'. Mr. Coleman retorted [wɛ̈l | bʌhʌ | ðaʔs 'prɛfrəbl̩ tə 'bi'ɪn ə 'fɑzbɔ:] 'Well, that's preferable to being a fuzzball (a type of fungus)'.

Another Selston man, Jimson Jordan, is reputed to have built a cart in the parlour of his house, and to have been unable to get it out when it was completed.

Here is a typical example of Selston humour. A friend of mine was on a bus which was taking miners to the pit, and there was an old man sitting downstairs with a pipe in his mouth. The conductress came to him and said, "No smoking". He took absolutely no notice. Then she repeated this a couple of times. Finally the old man said,

- "I'm not smoking."
- "You've got a pipe in your mouth," she said.
- "I've got my boots on but I'm not walking," he replied.

In a Selston public house my father heard the following description of someone who was not too bright: "Him! The first time he went up a ladder were down a well." On another occasion during the war he overheard several miners, members of the Home Guard, discussing the peculiarities of some of their colleagues. One of them, on duty guarding the pit at night, had seen a figure approaching which he had recognised

as the pit manager and challenged with the words, "Halt, Mr. Searson, who goes there?"

B. Folktales

Some of the tales told by Selston people are intended as nonsense and enter the realm of the folktale. An example is that told by "Mester Gascoyne", the "ardent gardener", quoted by Informant E, Chapter 8, p. 362.

C. Folk Drama

Guisers or Mummers

At Christmas, "bull guisers" used to go round from door to door in Selston reciting rhymes and acting little plays (see Informant D, Chapter 8, pp.368-9 for a fuller account). This was also common in the Eastwood area and mention is made of the guisers in The Rainbow by Lawrence. I am not sure whether the practice still continues, but within my memory guisers from this area have performed at an inn in Nuthall.